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Critics' THEATRE REVIEWS

1942

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†"All in Favor" opened Tuesday, January 20th, at the Henry Miller's Theatre.
†"Jason" opened Wednesday, January 21st, at the Hudson Theatre.
†"Porgy and Bess" opened Thursday, January 22nd, at the Majestic Theatre.
†"Cafe Crown" opened Friday, January 23rd, at the Cort Theatre.

THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

Critics' Theatre Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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NEW YORK TIMES, *January 24, 1942*

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"Cafe Crown"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

NOW that "Cafe Crown" has turned up on the stage at the Cort, where it was acted last evening, the Cafe Royal on Second Avenue will probably begin to do a large tourist business. For H. S. Kraft, who was co-author of "Cue for Passion" last season, has written a hospitable comedy about the culture club of the Yiddish Theatre and the geniuses and kibitzers who lounge there and play cards in the back room.

Europe used to be full of cafes where journalists wrote feuilletons and actors exchanged gossip, and Americans used to feel sentimental about them. But the same sort of thing has been going on for years at Twelfth Street and Second Avenue. With the assistance of Sam Jaffe, who is playing Hymie (or Herman), and Morris Carnovsky, who is playing David Cole (or, perhaps, Jacob Adler), Mr. Kraft has had the good sense to write a simple but warm-hearted comedy that makes the Cafe Crown seem particularly inviting.

* * *

What his characters are up to is amusing, but relatively unimportant. After being away for four or five months the venerable David Cole, father of the Second Avenue Theatre, returns to his old table in the cafe to interest Hymie, the legendary bus boy, in financing a fine production of a modernized Shakespeare play. Although Cole does not succeed exactly as he planned, he does manage to round up enough money for one final production and he casts it from among the permanent residents of the cafe.

If the story did not insist upon a happy, surprise ending, "Cafe Crown" might have a higher rank as genre comedy. When an episode seems false in the theatre, it invariably turns out to have been copied verbatim from life, and the author writes to this column the next day to say so. Probably Mr. Kraft will report that some actor saved the day in real life as David Cole does in the comedy, and that his elaborate device for bringing down the curtain on a made-to-order success is impersonal chronicling.

* * *

But the real attraction of "Cafe Crown" is not the plot but the characters and the unwritten protocol that governs their behavior. The waiters stare with contempt at strangers who have the impertinence to come in. But life is very pleasant for the regulars—the card players in the corner, the hack playwright, the curtain man from the theatre next door, the drama critic who writes his review before the play opens and reads it to the star, the talent agent from uptown. Every one knows every one else. Business is conducted with tremendous outbursts of temperament. No one has any secrets and no one stands on ceremony. They are not exactly one happy family, but they are clannish, emotional, self-contained, cultivated and loyal to Second Avenue. Mr. Kraft has written his characters without condescension but with humorous appreciation of the neighborhood folklore.

* * *

To give the characters a home-like environment, Boris Aronson has designed a warm-toned restaurant room in a venerable New York tradition. And Elia Kazan has directed a droll and friendly performance. As the fabulous Hymie, busboy by profession but local banker in fact, Sam Jaffe has the best part stage or screen has given him for several seasons, and he plays it capitally—with wit and also tenderness. Morris Carnovsky has a part that he, too, can play with pungent versatility. As the father of the Second Avenue Theatre, his grand manner and roaring oratory give the play its theatrical comedy.

In the long cast, there are enjoyable performances by Mitzi Hajos, Mary Mason and Margaret Waller as actresses, Jay Adler as an impatient waiter, Mervin Williams as a wide-eyed visitor, George Petrie as a brassy talent agent, Daniel Ocky as a bearded critic, Eduard Franz as an unrecognized playright, Lou Polan as egocentric stagehand and Ralph Leonard as a grinning producer. Mr. Kraft has given his characters just a touch of the bizarre in the writing, and the actors have not let him down. "Cafe Crown" is not a big comedy. But the portrait it draws of odds and ends of Second Avenue society is genial, comic and original. It would take years for a tourist to get that much fun out of the headquarters for culture in Second Avenue.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *January 24, 1942*

Cafe Crown Full of Sentiment

Comedy Tells Struggle of Yiddish Stage

By JOHN MASON BROWN

THE Cafe Crown in H. S. Kraft's new play is very like the Cafe Royal on Second Ave., they tell me. And the Cole family which meets therein to fight the battle of the Yiddish stage versus Broadway and Hollywood suggests the illustrious Adlers, as no one can fail to note.

The hero of this sentimental little comedy is supposedly a great actor of the old school; a titan of the Yiddish theater who first opposes any desertions in his family from behind the footlights of Second Ave. and then not only urges his prospective son-in-law—who was to play in his modern-dress production of King Lear—to answer the call of the Coast and go West on the opening night but makes all this possible by stepping into the role himself at a moment's notice.

Mr. Kraft's plot is no more substantial than this. He tries to use his grease-paint saga as a means of illustrating progress, of contrasting the old and the new and of demonstrating the losing fight of the picturesque foreign-language minorities in this country. But his best writing goes into the atmospheric touches by means of which he seeks to give color to his Cafe Crown.

Some of Mr. Kraft's incidental characters have a disturbing way of sounding like bad Odets or Saroyan. Much of his humor is no more than mechanical. But from time to time it has a ring which is sharp and incisive. The people who gather in this Second Ave. cafe behind a theater are amusing types. Unquestionably Mr. Kraft knows them and has observed them with affection. The card players, the frustrated playwright, the truculent waiter, the irrepressible proprietor—all of these are people who emerged fitfully as characters with whom it would be pleasant to make friends in Boris Aronson's agreeable setting.

The plot, however, proves their undoing; the plot and the scene. For Mr. Kraft is soon penalized for choosing so sociable a restaurant as a background for his play. To advance his story he must hush all the occupants of the other tables for long stretches at a time and permit either his actor-family or the great David Cole himself to hold forth, apparently without being overheard. Naturally this proves an awkward device. And a tiresome one, too.

Although some people seemed to be laughing heartily at what was going on at the Cort, I must admit I found most of it hard to take. For Sam Jaffe, however, and his performance of the stage-struck proprietor who is also a waiter I had only admiration. Mr. Jaffe contrived to act with humor and humanity even when he was speaking dialogue the tricks of which wore increasingly thin. His dislike of King Lear was entirely understandable.

Morris Carnovsky disturbed me almost as much as the florid and hopelessly overwritten part in which he found himself. Although I know he is an excellent character actor, I never for one moment was able to believe in Mr. Carnovsky as the particular actor he was supposed to be playing and was conscientiously endeavoring to play. He nudged with his cane. He made entrances hopeful of being in the grand style. He thundered and cajoled. He scolded and beamed. He even came in wearing the white beard of King Lear. But to me he was always Mr. Carnovsky trying resolutely to be something which he manifestly was not.

Although Elia Kazan's direction is spirited, and some of the local types are admirable so far as the script permits them to be realized, Cafe Crown struck me as being the sort of theatrical valentine—inoffensive but dull—which perhaps it would have been wiser not to bother to mail.

"Cafe Crown"

NEW YORK SUN, *January 24, 1942*

'Cafe Crown,' Yiddish Theater Comedy Opens at the Cort

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THE vivid, sharp-witted people of Second avenue swarm in H. S. Kraft's "Cafe Crown," which opened last evening at the Cort, and provide a restless and varied background for drama. They kibitz over the shoulders of pinochle players, negotiate at cafe tables and are as real as life and funnier. A background rich in character is thus provided for a drama which has, for practical purposes, none at all. For Mr. Kraft has written a libretto rather than a play.

It is by no means all waste. There is Hymie, for example. Hymie, purportedly drawn from life as the Cafe Crown itself is modeled on the Cafe Royal, is a fabulous waiter and a constant delight. He takes tips with one hand and writes checks with the other; he answers the telephone for actors just before deciding not to back their plays. Hymie's ironies are biting and his discourtesies are epic. And he is a ruined man because of Shakespeare, whose plays always let Hymie down. There is Toplitz the playwright and impromptu poet, who is rewriting "Rain" with a setting in the Catskills and a reformed rabbi for the clergyman. There is the critic of the Yiddish press, writing a review of a play not yet opened at a corner table. There is the stagehand who can hardly bear to haul up the curtain for the new version of the same old musical show, and Mr. Lipsky, who has composed a fine new song called "The Last Time I Saw Poland." Fine, funny people all.

Unfortunately, the play is not about these people. It is about a little group of people from the Yiddish stage. Not all the efforts of Sam Wanamker and Mary Mason can put the limberness of life into the wooden joints of the boy and girl. Everything is interesting in "Cafe Crown" except the story and the people in it. It is not so much a play as a show with book trouble.

Sam Jaffe's playing of Hymie almost makes up for everything. Recent misfortune, including the major one which found him playing Lear himself, have not diminished his effervescent comedy, or dulled his sharp sense of character. He animates everything he touches, which now and then includes the plot.

There are admirable performances, too, by Eduard Franz, Mitzi Hajos, John Brone, Solen Burry, Daniel Ocko and half a dozen more. There is sharp observation by Mr. Kraft and amused reporting. Boris Aronson's set is in itself an entertaining comment. But "Cafe Crown" is a frame without a picture.

'CAFE CROWN'

A play in three acts by H. S. Kraft; staged by Elia Kazan; setting by Boris Aronson; presented at the Cort Theater on January 23, 1942, by Carly Wharton and Martin Gabel. The cast:

Customer	Mervin Williams
Walter	John Brone
Rubin	Jed Cogut
Sam	Jay Adler
Kaplan	Alfred White
Mendel Polan	Daniel Ocko
Jacobson	Frank Gould
Mrs. Perlman	Paula Miller
Hymie	Sam Jaffe
Looie	Lou Polan
Walter	Whitner Bissell
Beggar	Solen Burry
Toplitz	Eduard Franz
Lester Freed	Sam Wanamaker
Norma Cole	Mary Mason
Ida Polan	Mitzi Hajos
David Cole	Morris Carnovsky
George Burton	George Petrie
Lipsky	Robert Leonard
Newspaper Man	Abraham J. Spelvin
Anna Cole	Margaret Waller
Florist	Michael Gorrin
Messenger Boy	Tom Jordan

NEW YORK POST, *January 24, 1942*

"Cafe Crown," a Saga of the East Side Yiddish Theatre

By WILELLA WALDORF

"PEOPLE want to be actors so they can sleep late," is one of the more profound conclusions reached in "Cafe Crown," H. S. Kraft's theatrical comedy presented last night at the Cort. The Yiddish Theatre district on lower Second Ave. is the background and all three acts take place in a restaurant frequented by actors, playwrights and producers of the Jewish stage, said to be patterned after the Cafe Royal that still stands at Second Ave. and Twelfth St.

The East Side Yiddish Theatre is a waning institution, many of its fine old actors having retired from active duty, while most of the promising younger thespians have leaped at a chance to stop playing rabbis with long gray beards and appear smooth-faced on Broadway or in Hollywood.

"Cafe Crown" is concerned for the most part with the efforts of David Cole, a famous but aging star, to recapture some of the glory of the past by producing, at Lipsky's Theatre, next door to the cafe, a modern Jewish version of "King Lear." It is his plan to interest Hymie, Cafe Crown's prosperous bus-boy, in backing the venture, but Hymie has been bitten by Shapespeare before. He remembers how much money he lost on a phenomenally unsuccessful production of "Richard One-Two-Three." Positively no more Shakespeare, says Hymie.

It is suggested that Mr. Cole produce instead "Sirocco," a thrilling new piece by Mr. Toplitz, the amazingly prolific Yeddish dramatist. The title, it appears, means something akin to rain in the South Sea Islands, but the locale is the Catskill Mountains and one of the leading characters is a Rabbi Davidson. Mr. Toplitz is heard to observe later that he cannot seem to write without doing a great deal of reading.

David Cole, however, is set on producing his own Yiddish "King Lear," with Mme. Cole as Lear's wife (a role invented especially to keep her from accepting a part with Mandelbaum in Flatbush). Fortunately for all concerned, the young man from Melbourne, Australia, who has been hanging about goggle-eyed for some time, turns out to be Mr. Cole's hitherto unknown son (born in Warsaw, Poland, during one of the Cole tours) and he has a thousand pounds to invest in his father's dramatic venture. The show is on!

Carnovsky and Jaffe

Mr. Kraft has evolved a wisp of plot about Lester Freed, a young Yidish actor torn between starring on Second Ave. and rushing off to Hollywood as Norma, David Cole's daughter, wants him to, but "Cafe Crown" for the most part turns over the stage to Morris Carnovsky as the famous old star and Sam Jaffe as the business-like bus-boy. They proceed to put on a show of their own, assisted at intervals by a chorus of character people doing specialties while the two stars are catching their respective breaths.

Mr. Carnovsky's portrait of David Cole, the actor of the old school, complete with fur-lined overcoat and silver-headed cane, is a marvelously detailed piece of work, as all of Mr. Carnovsky's perfomances are apt to be, while Sam Jaffe is remarkably droll in a quieter vein as Hymie, the bus-boy. Mr. Jaffee has been absent from the theatre for so long that we had all but forgotten what a delightful actor he can be.

"Cafe Crown" is more of a Second Avenue charade than a play, and we cannot imagine it interesting the general public very much. Stage people both of Second Avenue and Broadway, however, are bound to enjoy the theatrical goings-in, and there is some contagious Jewish humor in the piece.

The production in general is rather hit-or-miss under Elia Kazan's direction. There are plenty of ragged edges indicating the need of a few more rehearsals, and some of the minor characters fail to fit into the background very comfortably. Sam Wanamaker, Whitner Bissell, George Petrie, Mitzi Hajos, Eduard Franz and others hard to identify, however, seem to know their way around the premises, and Boris Aronson has designed a setting that is presumably a replica of the Cafe Royal, an East Side rendezvous we happen never to have visited, alas!

There were many times last night when "Cafe Crown" reminded us forcibly of some of the Yiddish plays we happen to have seen with everybody on stage doing a terrific lot of acting, and the play itself making no sense whatever. Nevertheless Mr. Carnovsky and Mr. Jaffe managed to have a lot of fun for themselves, and some of their good spirits slopped over the footlights into the audience.

By the way, the East Side dramatic critic in the play wrote his notice of the modern "King Lear" before it opened, explaining that if he waited to see the show, the review wouldn't be printed until day after tomorrow. Shocking.

"Cafe Crown"

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *January 24, 1942*

Cafe Society

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

FOR years stories have been reaching Broadway about a fabulous restaurant in Second Avenue called the Cafe Royal. There, according to the stories, the intellectuals of the local Jewish cultural world, in particular the actors, poets, dramatists and critics who have made the Yiddish theater so vivid and warm-hearted, gather for food, drink, conversation, business and the amiable exhibition of their colorful egos. Lives, it is said, are there lived out in public and personal dramas have their own audiences amid a lively and teeming display of friendly humanity. Now the theater, in one of its exploratory moods, takes us to a place that is said to be a counterpart of this celebrated meeting place and tells us about it in a friendly play called "Cafe Crown."

* * *

The work of H. S. Kraft, who obviously knows and loves the place and the people he is writing about, "Cafe Crown" is as pleasant, likable and warm-hearted as the characters it is affectionately contemplating. There is nothing stirring or exciting or of great dramatic import in the new play, but in its quiet, unostentatious way it manages to be modestly and agreeably refreshing. It is a pleasure to meet the great actor-producer of the Yiddish theater, his wife and his family, the young character actor with yearnings for Hollywood, the critic who reads his notices to the actors before their play opens, the dramatist who has just got around to rewriting "Rain" with the Reverend Davidson as a rabbi, the bus boy who backs the shows, the beggar who will take nothing less than two hundred dollars and all the other pleasant people who make the Cafe Crown their home.

* * *

There isn't a great deal of story to Mr. Kraft's comedy, but it probably suffices, even though it does have a sort of unhappy ending. That is to say, the young actor does go off to Hollywood in the last act. Anyway, the tale of the veteran actor-producer, half charlatan and half man of honest talent, who is bent on putting on a modern Yiddish production of "King Lear" as the latest of his farewells to the theatre, is frankly and unashamedly sentimental in the telling, but the atmosphere and the characters are racy and amusing enough to atone for any frailty in the narrative or any excess in the sentiment. "Cafe Crown" is proudly as unsophisticated and modest little comedy, but it has the virtue of introducing us to some comparatively fresh characters and of looking upon them with rather proud admiration.

* * *

The acting is as friendly as the play. In the two leading roles, Morris Carnovsky, as the great producer, and Sam Jaffe, as the bus boy patron of the arts, give their customary expert performances, and of the other players, Jay Adler as a sardonic waiter, Miss Paula Miller as the proprietress, Lou Polan as a scornful stagehand, Whitner Bissell as a shy young man, Eduard Franz as the borowing dramatist, Sam Wanamaker as the boy looking toward Hollywood, Miss Mary Mason as the producer's rebellious daughter, Miss Mitzi Hajos as a character actress, George Petrie as an agent, Daniel Ocko is the critic, Miss Margaret Waller as the producer's actress wife and Robert Leonard as another Second Avenue impresario are of particular help. "Cafe Crown" is certainly of no epoch-making critical merit, but it is mellow and engaging.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *January 24, 1942*

'Cafe Crown' a Slice of Actor Life From Down on 2nd Avenue

"Cafe Crown," comedy by H. S. Kraft. Produced by Carly Wharton and Martin Gabel at the Cort Theatre, New York, Jan. 23, 1942.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

IN "Cafe Crown" at the Cort Theatre Sam Jaffe lets his hair out and plays an old-time busboy who has grown up with the Hebrew Actor's Union, and Morris Carnovsky plays an old and proud Yiddish actor. They're perfect types.

At least I can credit them with being perfect, without knowing much about Second Ave cafes and no more about the Hebrew Actor's Union than I read in the papers.

Certainly they give perfect performances, each in the chaarcter tradition of the theatre of which he probably is most fond. Jaffe gentle, kindly, shrewd, warm-hearted but close-fisted. Carnovsky expansive, human, of resonant voice and a natural dignity.

Both are technically skilled in stage portraiture. Jaffe with a passion for detail, Carnovsky with a keen interest in a fluent expression.

Having been directed by Elia Kazan, also a keen observer of the theatre of types and the drama of life, each is given a free hand and the comedy profits from his use of it.

"Cafe Crown" is a racial group comedy of amusing incidents; a record of two evenings picked out of an exciting month the time David Cele, as well known in the Yiddish theatre as Adler or Thomashevsky, came back to stage a new play at the Lipsky theatre.

David, getting old and irascible, and clinging to his flights of temperament as a prima donna nurses her fading top notes, is seeking capital for his play.

Family Stuff

Hymie, the busboy at the Crown, who worships the actor and has had some part of the investment in each of the Cole productions, is happy to help until he suddenly discovers that Shakespeare, too, is involved. To Hymie, Shakespeare, as an investment, is odorous.

Tied in with the old actor's effort to get his modern "King Lear" on is a family quarrel with his wife and daughter, and his hope of keeping a prospective son-in-law away from Hollywood—a Paul Muni inspiration probably.

It is, as said, a comedy of amusing incidents rather than sustained interest. The effort to preserve the casualness of cafe life naturally draws attention to what the characters are doing and away from their reasons for doing it.

A number of supporting small parts are well played by Sam Wanamaker, Mary Mason, Whitner Bissell, Mitzi Hajos, Margaret Waller, Eduard Franz, Paula Miller and several others.

The setting by Boris Aronson looks like a perfect copy and the Kazan direction is carefully detailed and convincing.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
January 25, 1942

Jewish Cafe Life Wears a Bit Thin

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

FOR *Cafe Crown* read *Cafe Royal*, that famous bohemian meeting place on Second Avenue which is the Yiddish Theater's Algonquin. Mr. Kraft has recreated it in an atmospheric comedy which has its moments of warmth, its sprinkling of laughs and its flashes of character. It is a likeable enough play, but it is much too thin and static to fill a whole evening. As a playwright Mr. Kraft has not proved himself particularly inventive—the same jokes and talk and mannerisms float from act to act, and as an observer Mr. Kraft has shown rather a better eye for revealing oddity than humanity.

Cafe Crown is a place where habitues—many of them card players—are more happily at home than in their own living rooms, and where strangers are gazed at not merely with amazement, but almost with indignation. The czar of the place is its middle-aged busboy, Hymie, who has somehow—very likely by his genius for scrounging tips—become a man of affluence, and the angel of a good many plays. It is to Hymie that the great man of the Yiddish Theatre, a pompous and grandiloquent fellow with a taste for the classics, comes whenever he wants to offer a "farewell" production. His efforts this time are to get Hymie, who has learned to his sorrow that Shakespeare is a bad investment, to back a play about "an old Jew on Riverside Drive" which is actually *King Lear*. Out of this situation, which soon involves most of the great actor's trooping family, *Cafe Crown* evolves what little plot there is.

Sam Jaffe plays Hymie with considerable humor and sense of character, never spilling over into burlesque. As the Jacob-Adlerish great actor, Morris Carnovsky has caught the self-importance and fur-coated grand manner of the man, though somehow not the magnetism that would explain his success. Mary Mason, Sam Wanamaker, Jay Adler, Eduard Franz and others are agreeable in smaller roles, Elia Kazan has directed the play pleasantly, and Boris Aronson has done an evocative set.

The atmosphere of the *Cafe Crown* would be a very pleasant one in which to eat some good chopped chicken liver and drink a glass of tea. But in the theatre, where one can only watch the actors eating, the atmosphere alone is not enough.

"Cafe Crown"

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, *January 24, 1942*

'Cafe Crown' Opens At The Cort Theatre

Jaffe, Carnovsky Star in New Play About Theatre

By JOHN ANDERSON

AS SOMETHING of a fanatic about the theatre myself I am always a sucker for plays in which some venerated actor shouts the challenge of the living drama, and like a frenzied, sentimental, foolish, and touching Canute, bids the rising tide of movies and radio to stand still. I know it is silly, and a little like pretending that the automobile is not here to stay though not parked (even without tires) but it is an heroic pose, full of grease paint, make-up putty, hokum and honest passion—all of the heady mixture that makes the theatre come alive.

"Cafe Crown" by H. S. Kraft, which Carly Wharton and Martin Gable presented at the Cort last night, is that sort of play. It is all about a celebrated actor of the Yiddish theatre, and a fantastic waiter in a Second Avenue cafe so besotted about the theatre himself that he backs not only the great star, but any stray troupe needing the extra wad. It is back-stage sentiment over a glass of tear-strewn beer.

Resonant Grandeur

People whose knowledge of the New York stage is not bounded by Broadway will readily identify the little cafe, waiter and all as an actual Second Avenue Algonquin, and there will be those who will see under the resonant grandeur and splurging egotism of the old actor in "Cafe Crown" hints enough to identify a famous Yiddish star. Whether invented or real Mr. Kraft's two central characters have a true existence on the stage of the Cort, rich, warm and comical. The serious trouble is, however, that the framework of "Cafe Crown" is too flimsy to fill up an evening with satisfying drama. It is simply a pair of vivid character studies.

It is static, and almost totally lacking in suspense. The talk eddies around the tables in the dim cafe, where an interminable pinochle game goes on in one corner, and where Hymie, the waiter is critic, producer, angel and Greek Chorus, all between orders for chopped herring.

Most of the talk is with, and about, David Cole, picturesque veteran and theatrical die-hard, a snowy giant whose love of his Yiddish stage and his worship of the classics, lead him to believe scornfully that Broadway and Hollywood are both outlandish pretenders. The only struggle in the play (except getting money out of Hymie to back Shakespeare) is over a young man beckoned by the movie money bags, but brow-beaten by the relentless Cole. Cole finally yields him to Hollywood and then in the beard of King Lear, goes on to take his place.

Amusing Portraits

Mr. Kraft has drawn amusing portraits of the shrewd, cranky, drama-loving waiter, and the bombastic star, and has enriched their talk with alusive humor that is both salty and endearing. The two characters provide a field day for two of our best actors, Sam Jaffee and Morris Carnovsky and the performances are done with immense relish and lustines. Even with the little tags of humor, sprinkled on his exits until they become tiresome cliches, Mr. Jaffe is able to make Hymie a genuine creation, and Mr. Carnovsky gives David Cole the flamboyant works of his most ornamental embroidery.

But the rest are shadowy creatures, admirably enough played, but mere paper dolls compared to the big boys. I was surprised that they could even attract their attention, and Mr. Kazan's direction has not avoided the suggestion of stage vacuums.

I felt that I had met a couple of interesting characters who were idling away the evening in one of Mr. Aronson's most hospitable settings, but speaking, as Gogol would say, of this and that.

"Porgy and Bess"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *January 23, 1942*

Revival of Porgy and Bess Belongs on Your 'Must' List

By JOHN MASON BROWN

THE tragedy of George Gershwin's death was again made clear last night when Porgy and Bess was revived after an absence of seven years. Mr. Gershwin may not have been quite ready to tackle and sustain opera that is truly grand when he set Dorothy and DuBose Heyward's Porgy to music. But his musical background for this famous saga of Charleston's Catfish Row has its constantly beguiling features.

Although the great moments are missing, the delightful ones are numerous. What Mr. Gershwin's score lacks to equal the tension of the book's emotional climaxes, it more than makes up for in color, in gaiety, in the sheer loveliness of its melodies. It is a brilliant manifestation of Mr. Gershwin's maturing powers. Its pretentions may have been large, but its idiom is popular. It does not put the Blues, or Jazz, or folk rhythms on stilts. It merely gives them wings. So equipped they fly to new altitudes.

* * *

Mr. Gershwin's tunes are more memorable than his crises. If the utterances of great anguish still remained commonplace in his hands, the commonplaces of Broadway and the byways soared to unsuspected heights as he transformed them. Such songs as I Got Plenty o' Nuttin', or A Woman Is a Sometime Thing, It Ain't Necessarily So, Summer Time, or the street cries of the Strawberry Woman and the Crab Man are rippling, lively and enchanting melodies.

Last night full justice was done to these, and to the whole score, by the orchestra Alexander Smallens conducted with an unfailing awareness both of musical pleasure and dramatic need. Indeed, Cheryl Crawford's entire revival is something to be welcomed gratefully.

Having been pruned of its original recitatives, and hence cut by at least 45 minutes, Porgy and Bess gains considerably. Although it still has its sedative moments, these are soon shaken off. Robert Ross' direction is full of animation, movement and engaging detail. It may omit the shadow scene which Rouben Mamoulian made so notable in the first Porgy, but it has a fine fluidity and enjoys the good fortune of depending upon a host of colored players to whom both music and acting seem to come naturally.

* * *

Todd Duncan's crippled Porgy, who must win the easy-going Bess from the villainous Crown, remains a spirited performance. Anne Brown's Bess continues to be more vividly characterized than sung. Warren Coleman is once again the mountainous brute who is Crown. Avon Long sells his Happy Dust as Sportin' Life with a dancer's grace and projects his songs admirably. Such reliables as Georgette Harvey, Edward Matthews and J. Rosamond Johnson are on hand. So, too, is an irresistible, if unidentifiable, little colored boy.

I must confess I always liked Mr. Heyward's novel better than I did the first dramatization made of it. Much as I admired the Theater Guild's original production, I missed in the story as retold in play form the charms of Mr. Heyward's distinguished prose. Mr. Gershwin's score offered when first heard a delightful substitute for this prose. And his music, in the present excellent production, proves even more enjoyable than it did seven years ago. So, as a matter of fact, does the evening as a whole. Without question Porgy and Bess belongs on your "must" list.

'PORGY AND BESS.'

A musical play in three acts, based on the play "Porgy" by DuBose and Dorothy Heyward; book by Mr. Heyward; music by George Gershwin; lyrics by Mr. Heyward and Ira Gershwin; directed by Robert Ross; settings by Herbert Andrews; costumes by Paul du Pont; revived at the Majestic Theater on January 22, 1942, by Cheryl Crawford. The cast:

Mingo	Jimmy Waters
Clara	Harriett Jackson
Sportin' Life	Avon Long
Jake	Edward Matthews
Maria	Georgette Harvey
Annie	Catherine Ayers
Lily	Helen Dowdy
Serena	Ruby Elzy
Robbins	Henry Davis
Jim	Jack Carr
Peter	Robert Ecton
Porgy	Todd Duncan
Crown	Warren Coleman
Bess	Anne Brown
Detective	Gibbs Penrose
First Policeman	William Richardson
Second Policeman	Paul du Pont
Undertaker	John Garth
Frazier	J. Rosamond Johnson
Nelson	William Bowers
Strawberry Woman	Helen Dowdy
Crab Man	William Woolfolk
Coroner	Al West

"Porgy and Bess"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *January 23, 1942*

'Porgy and Bess' Is Revived Triumphantly at the Majestic

"Porgy and Bess," opera by Du Bose Heyward; music by George Gershwin. Revived by Cheryl Crawford at the Majestic Theatre, New York, Jan. 22, 1942.

★ ★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

THE throbbing vitality that is "Porgy and Bess" was in evidence again last night at the Majestic. Cheryl Crawford's revival loses little, if anything, of the values of the original production. Nothing, that is, save the thrill that went with the first full recognition of what George Gershwin was to mean to American music.

In fact, I would say without much fear of contradiction that this is a smoother and a more melodious production than the original. That probably is due to the familiarity that has come, not only to the players in their work, but to the opera's hearers in general through the six years that the highlights of the score have been frequently repeated.

The Gershwin music was impressive, and moving, in 1935. But it also was a little too much for laymen to absorb in one evening's devotion to it. "Porgy and Bess" lived despite the discouragement of such monotony as the strain and tenseness of that score, as well as an overlong production, developed.

Virtues Recovered

It lived because of Todd Duncan and "I Got Plenty of Nuttin'," and "Sportin' Life," and "It Ain't Necessarily So," and Todd and Anne Brown and "Bess, You Is My Woman Now" and "Summertime."

It lived because of a striking Rouben Mamoulian staging of Catfish Row and its simple people moving through the miseries of poverty and death to the simple joys of hope and happiness.

It lived because of the memories of as fine a colored choir as had been given a stage hearing up to then, and as fine ensembles and as effective an orchestration as we had known.

It lived because George Gershwin had put the best of himself and of his genius into it, and because both were just coming into an appreciation of their true importance.

These virtues were again in evidence last night, because the cast is practically the same as it was before. Todd Duncan is again singing the triumphant Porgy and Anne Brown is again the willing but uncertain Bess. It may be their fine voices have mellowed with the passing of their earlier nervousness and the gaining of added authority. Certainly they were in perfect voice last night.

Slick Newcomer

There is a slick new Sportin' Life in Avon Long. He has happy dust in his feet as well as his hat band, and slithered through his scenes with the grace of a ballet dancer and the enthusiasm of an old-time cake walker.

Ruby Elzy is there to sing the mourning songs of the unhappy Serena with all their weird cadences, and if Serena has put on a pound or two and looks less miserable than she used to, she is still doing full justice to her songs.

Warren Coleman, another six inches added to his chest, is again the ugly Crown. He has to play off a little if Porgy is to throttle him effectively, but he is magnificently defiant in the storm scene. Neither God nor the electricians dared strike him down.

Miss Crawford has done the renewal, or the relighting and rebuilding, of the scenery splendidly, and the cuts in some of the scenes help a lot in sustaining audience interest.

Alexander Smallens conducted inspiringly and last night's audience, reasonable about encores, was enthusiastic in its honest tributes.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *January 23, 1942*

Return of a Classic

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IT IS a pleasure to be able to report this morning that "Porgy and Bess" is better than ever. Since it was first presented here in 1935, George Gershwin's lyric drama about the doomed romance of the crippled beggar of Catfish Row has come to be accepted as one of the modern American classics and its fame has grown steadily. But in the theater works that had seemed admirable at the occasion of their birth and had gone on to become treasured memories have a sickening way of being disillusioning when they are later revived for us. "Porgy and Bess" suffers no such tragic fate. Splendidly staged by Robert Ross and beautifully acted and sung by a company which includes most of the members of the original cast, it takes on new life, excitement, passion and beauty. Its revival is one of the few completely happy events of this dramatic season.

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In the original presentation there was an occasional suggestion of the pretentious in the production of the work. It had a way of dawdling, also, and it could not resist one or two hints of musical and dramatic ostentation. It had great and endearing merits which were not to be rendered any less impressive by the few faults, but the flaws were nevertheless present. Now in this admirable revival most of them have been done away with. "Porgy and Bess" still has a certain jerkiness and there are too many changes of scene for complete comfort, but all of the touches of pretentiousness are gone, the pace has been quickened and the editing has been sagely managed, so that the work moves more confidently, more dramatically and more honestly than ever before. It is beautiful to listen to, exciting to watch and filled with a genuineness of emotion which American lyric drama rarely offers. Truly it is a modern classic.

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Mr. Robert Lawrence, who is an authority on such matters, tells you in a near-by column about the admirable operatic values of the work. Permit me to note, though, that among its other splendid virtues "Porgy and Bess" is filled with enchanting songs. Even in the reasonably humble sphere of popular music its score is as lovely as it is memorable. To the specialist in Broadway musical shows such pieces as "Summer Time," "A Woman Is a Sometime Thing," "I Got Plenty o' Nothin'," "Bess, You Is My Woman Now," "I Loves You, Porgy," and "There's a Boat That's Leavin' Soon for New York" are hauntingly beautiful, while "It Ain't Necessarily So" is one of the great modern comic numbers. Mr. Gershwin's music is to be loved as well as admired, which is one reason why its popular and critical popularity are both great. We didn't need this revival to show us how sorely Mr. Gershwin is missed, but the new production does pay that tribute to his memory.

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The only important change in the cast is the transfer of the role of Sportin' Life from John W. Bubbles to Avon Long. I miss the rich personal charm of the great Mr. Bubbles, but the newcomer is admirable. Once again Miss Anne Brown is a passionate and moving Bess, playing and singing brilliantly, while Todd Duncan is sympathetic and touching as Porgy in a performance which, as I recall it, is better than the one he gave in the first presentation. In lesser roles, Miss Ruby Elzy, Warren Coleman, J. Rosamond Johnson, Edward Matthews and the distinguished Miss Georgette Harvey are of particular help, while the humbler denizens of Catfish Row, in particular the smallest of the children, are excellent. It is worth repeating that Mr. Ross's staging is one of the fine things of the production. "Porgy and Bess" is a splendid production of a work which the American theater rightly loves and cherishes.

"Porgy and Bess"

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, *January 23, 1942*

'Porgy and Bess' Revived at Majestic

Gershwin-Heyward Opera Handsomely Produced and Superbly Sung

By JOHN ANDERSON

AS ONE who found the original production of the Gershwin-Heyward folk-opera "Porgy and Bess" somewhat ponderous and dull when it was presented six years ago I am happy to report that Cheryl Crawford's revival at the Majestic last night seemed a great improvement.

Since many members of the cast are the same the change is due, apparently, to the removal of some of the operatic lumber, and to livelier and less reverent direction. Most of the overpowering fumes of producing an opera by Gershwin seem to have cleared away, leaving everything a little simpler and easier.

It is handsomely produced and superbly sung, as before, and while it has some fine passages it never seems to me to capture completely the vivid tragedy of either the book or the play. Instead of deepening the emotional qualities of Catfish Row with music, the operatic treatment seems to me to make many of them artificial and less compelling.

There are, of course, exceptions, instances in which the Gershwin music does heighten the effect enormously. Such celebrated items as "A Woman Is a Sometime Thing," Serena's beautiful lament, the lullaby "Summertime," Porgy's "I Got Plenty of Nuttin," and the lovely second act duet "Bess, You Is My Woman Now" make delightful music of mood and feeling and the street cries are both clever and atmospheric.

It is in putting the pieces together into a whole musical fabric of large design that the score seems to me to fall, and fall awkwardly into the empty routine of operatic ritual.

The recitatives, if I remember rightly, have been cut severely but there are still enough to make the business sound self-conscious and a little formal if not pretentious, all effects that are against the violent material of the story—the living, loving, and killing among the Negroes in the poor, but stagily picturesque squalor of Charleston.

Nor does it seem to me that Mr. Gershwin exploited fully that other side of the Negro's racial genius by giving the opera the vitality and movement of suitable dancing. It is larynx-bound, tied hand and foot by its vocal chords, and only rarely, and then half-heartedly does it break into a step. Thanks to the agile and amusing work of Avon Long, as Sportin' Life, it has a couple of passages of gaiety, which, if not heartily written are admirably executed to provide welcome relief.

If a composer wants to write an opera that is his business, but I cling to the stubborn notion that "Porgy and Bess" would be far better if it cut out most of the operatic trimmings and became simply and frankly a play with music.

Miss Crawford has certainly not stinted herself in the production. Soudekine's brilliant settings have been replaced by effective designs by Herbert Andrews, and the few changes in the cast leave the performance as good, if not better than ever, under Robert Ross's fluent and informal direction. The three principal performances, in fact, seemed richer and livelier.

Todd Duncan brings new warmth and sympathy to the part of Porgy, and sings it admirably, especially in "I Got Plenty of Nuttin." Anne Brown's Bess is similarly improved since it adds to its vocal powers the persuasion of a genuine characterization. Warren Coleman's villainous Crown is the perfection of menacing brutality.

The aforementioned Mr. Long is excellent as the dope peddler, and the ever reliable Georgette Harvey lends again her majestic presence as the matriarch of Catfish Row. Ruby Elzy provides a touching portrait of the violently widowed Serena, and in the "saucer burial" scene sings the heartbreaking lament.

Perhaps I should report that I heard a belligerent First Nighter proclaiming during the intermission that it is "still too damned good for them" though he did not blow a whistle for the tumbrils.

NEW YORK TIMES, *January 23, 1942*

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"Porgy and Bess"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

AFTER more than six years George Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess" is back on the stage. It was put on at the Majestic last evening. Since the memorable opening in 1935 Gershwin has died, leaving music that has been steadily in use and accumulating prestige; and DuBose Heyward, who wrote the libretto, died a year and a half ago. But some of the songs of "Porgy and Bess," like "Summer Time," "I Got Plenty o' Nuttin'" and "It Ain't Necessarily So," have been played and sung constantly in concerts and over the radio and have become an authentic part of our musical heritage. Although the original production of "Porgy and Bess" ran only about four months, its reputation has grown beyond that of any musical work produced in the theatre. "Show Boat," which was operetta, is the only theatre work that lives so high in public esteem.

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Fortunately, most of the original singers have returned. Todd Duncan, the crippled gallant of Catfish Row, is singing and acting with more assurance than he did originally. Anne Brown is Bess again, with the old vibrancy of spirit, and Warren Coleman is the heroic Crown once more. Avon Long, who is playing Sportin' Life, was not in the original production. But he is an actor of remarkable lightness of foot and cynical mockery. Although Bubbles played the part in the first production with memorable humor, Mr. Long's style in "It Ain't Necessarily So" is triumphantly vivid and entertaining.

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Ruby Elzy, who sang the melancholy "My Man's Gone Now" with so much sweet humility in 1935, has recaptured her original delicacy of feeling. Harriett Jackson, who is one of the new voices in the revival, opens the performance beautifully with a lyric singing of "Summer Time." It is a glorious song that comes almost as soon as the curtain is up, and Miss Jackson is singing it like a thoroughbred.

Ever since the original drama of "Porgy" was produced by the Theatre Guild nearly fifteen years ago, Catfish Alley has been one of the best loved places in the American drama. Raffish and battered, it swarms with humanity and excitement, and the Gershwin score for voices and orchestra is a flaring comment on the turbulent life of the Negro neighbors. For the current revival, Robert Ross and his associates have taken a more informal attitude toward the recitative that disturbed some of us hardened play-goers originally, and the opera has been compressed.

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Whether the compression is responsible for the nervous stridency of the performance or whether Gershwin wrote the score that way, this playgoer is not able to say. If memory serves, the original "Porgy and Bess" insisted upon being operatic over incidents that hardly required the labor and volume of excited musical treatment. But whatever the reason may be, "Porgy and Bess" is over-wrought. The vehemence seldom slackens. Although the folks of Catfish Row have occasional light moments, they are into some choral crisis before you know it, singing their heads off, and the sheer volume of sustained sound is physically overpowering. Perhaps Gershwin stood a little in awe of the operatic form in which for the first time he was working.

Although he respected opera as a form, he had a genius for songs. And what a playgoer can still enjoy with the most rhapsodic pleasure are the great songs he wrote for this lovable, free-hand sketch of a Negro community—"Bess, You Is My Woman Now," "It Takes a Long Pull to Get There," 'Leavin' Fo' de Promis' Lan'" and others that are more famous. It is a privilege to hear them again.

And if it is not in bad taste to mention prices in this connection, the revival of "Porgy and Bess," with Alexander Smallens in full dress in the conductor's box, has a top tariff of $2.75 at the box office. Also, Sunday night performances.

"Porgy and Bess"

NEW YORK SUN, *January 23, 1942*

'Porgy and Bess,' Gershwin's Folk Opera, Is Revived at the Majestic

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THERE has always been some question whether the DuBose Heyward-George Gershwin "Porgy and Bess," first produced six years or so ago, is opera or play with music. That its revival last evening at the Majestic Theater is celebrated in these columns is not to be taken as an answer, but is to be ascribed to the mysterious workings of chance. Whatever the final decision, "Porgy and Bess" remains a moving, bright-hued story told with the throbbing undercurrent of exciting music.

The present management seems inclined a little to the opera theory. At any rate, it appends to other information furnished by the program a scene by scene synopsis, full of such helpful remarks as: "Clara sings a lullaby to her baby." This evidently expresses the management's conviction that a play with music simply can't be in English, whatever it may sound like. This is not really true. Mr. Heyward's book, an adaptation, you will recall, of his original play, is in good, sound English and perfectly comprehensible. It tells a good, sound story, and a deeply touching one.

Almost every one remembers the story—how the lovely Bess came to Catfish Row and the arms of the cripple, Porgy, when Crown fled from the police; how Crown regained her for a time and how Porgy, whose arms and hands were mighty, killed Crown. Then they locked Porgy up for a little while and when he returned to Catfish Row Bess had gone again, this time with Sportin' Life and his "happy dust." You will remember how a hurricane beats across the scene and how the whole stage riots with color and detail. If you remember all this, and how Porgy goes off finally in his goat wagon, bound for New York and Bess, you will find the present production all that you remember. For Miss Cheryl Crawford has not so much revived as duplicated "Porgy and Bess." With only one or two exceptions the same actors play the important roles as played them in 1935 and the exceptions are not important.

The play is reported to have been cut, but the cuts are not very evident. It is still, I think, too long, particularly in the second act. (There was a while, there, when I was willing to admit it was an opera.) Now and then the detail, fascinating in itself, is distracting. Occasionally there is repetition in the staging, as in the choral scenes of the first and second acts. But it is a lusty, colorful, often barbaric drama and the music is by George Gershwin. Better ears than mine have heard the music and more musical minds reported on it. I just think it's pretty grand, particularly in simple things like "I Got Plenty o' Nuttin'" and "A Woman Is a Sometime Thing" and "Summer Time."

Todd Duncan and Anne Brown play the title roles again and both are as good as you remember them. Harriet Jackson has graduated from the chorus to the role of Clara, which she sings beautifully. Ruby Elzy is back in the part of Serena. Avon Long has replaced John W. Bubbles as Sportin' Life and is nimbly amusing, but doesn't make nearly so much of "It Ain't Necessarily So." Play or opera, too long or not, "Porgy and Bess" is still an event.

NEW YORK POST, *January 23, 1942*

George Gershwin's 'Porgy and Bess' Revived at the Majestic Theatre

By WILELLA WALDORF

WHEN "Porgy and Bess" was first produced on Broadway by the Theatre Guild in October, 1935, Samuel Chotzinoff, then music critic of the Post, remarked: "As entertainment it is a hybrid, fluctuating constantly between music-drama, musical comedy and operetta."

The Guild referred to the work in its program as "an American folk opera." Cheryl Crawford, who revived it last night at the Majestic Theatre with many of the original Negro singers in their familiar parts, calls it simply George Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess."

Even some of the most ardent admirers of the original production were inclined to admit, if pressed, that "Porgy and Bess" was overlong. Bearing this in mind, Miss Crawford has seen to it that around forty-five minutes have been cut from the running time, much of the recitative that bothered the critics seven years ago having gone into the discard. The present version, therefore, is shorter, but in other respects does not depart violently from the original Guild presentation, as we recall it.

The Gershwin music is still very pleasant to hear, especially when sung by the Eva Jessye choir, and the Negro community life in Catfish Row goes on pretty much as it did before. Of the principals, only Clara and Sportin' Life are newcomers. Alexander Smallens is still the conductor. The settings by Herbert Andrews are suitable if perhaps not as elaborate as the Guild's, and Robert Ross, the present director, has wisely incorporated some of the old Mamoulian group effects into the new production.

Operatic Tradition

This reviewer, no musical connoisseur, has always felt that "Porgy and Bess" lacked the absorbing dramatic qualities of the original play, "Porgy." It was difficult for us to embrace the operatic tradition as applied to Catfish Row seven years ago and it is just as difficult now, with forty-five minutes, including much of the recitative, cut out. Despite some genuinely stirring dramatic moments, and the haunting Gershwin songs, "Porgy and Bess" still seems a very long evening to this benighted reporter.

Probably it should be stated at this point that operatic conventions in general worry us a good deal. Several performances celebrated for brilliant dramatic technique at the Metropolitan Opera House have sent us hustling into the night.

"Porgy and Bess" is so much better staged and acted than most operas that it is not to be compared to the Metropolitan standard, but the very fact that it is cast in an operatic mold has a tendency to inhibit the natural style and exuberance of the Negro performers. We miss the fine dramatic gusto of "Porgy." There is gusto in "Porgy and Bess," but it is more calculated, watch-the-conductor gusto. That is inevitable in opera, even folk opera, and many people will find that hearing the Gershwin music more than makes up for what is lost.

The leading singers are again putting over "Summer Time," "A Woman Is a Sometime Thing," "Bess, You Is My Woman Now," "I Got Plenty o' Nuttin'," "It Ain't Necessarily So" and the other popular numbers in capable, if not spectacular, fashion, a big ovation last night going to Avon Long, the new Sportin' Life.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER, "PM", *January 23, 1942*

'Porgy and Bess' Improves With Age

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

WHAT a wonderful idea it was for Cheryl Crawford to revive *Porgy and Bess!* It brought the theater, which has been practically in a coma since Christmas, to excited and instantaneous life last night. I did not hear it when it was originally performed seven years ago, but I feel certain that it can have lost nothing of its power to arouse and charm; indeed, with the recitative that presumably slowed it down omitted, it is very likely richer and more continuously satisfying now than it was then. Certainly it is the most robust, as it is the most genuinely American, opera that this country has produced.

I am by no means sure, however, that its distinctively operatic qualities are its strongest ones. George Gershwin's talents were too great to call for any but the severest kind of criticism; and though it would be idiotic for me to pose as a music critic, I don't feel that his most individual self came out in the more ambitious side of his opera. That side revealed a good many moments of derivativeness and pretentiousness and strain.

It is as something a little less than opera, though decidedly more than even the best musical comedy, that *Porgy and Bess* really triumphs. It triumphs in its excellent balance of story and music, in its lighter passages, in its lowdown and folk passages, and above all in its songs.

Hearing those songs again last night, with all their melodic freshness and rhythmical beat and thrust, one realized how incomparably original Gershwin was in the field he knew best, the field for which he will be remembered longest. Hearing, before the evening was half over, such a string of them as *Summer Time* and *I Got Plenty o' Nuttin'* and *Bess, You Is My Woman Now* and *It Ain't Necessarily So* was to forget all the musical-comedy scores that one had praised for a good many seasons. Those songs really caught one up with the excitement that comes when one good thing keeps topping another.

The present production seems to me in every way admirable. Robert Ross has directed it with a fine sense of pace and movement, keeping the large stage from ever seeming cluttered on the one hand, or posed on the other.

Todd Duncan could hardly have been better as Porgy seven years ago than he is now. Not only does he sing with great charm and effectiveness, but his acting turns the crippled beggar into a real and touching human being. In her original role of Bess, Anne Brown sings delightfully. Avon Long, who was not in the first production, plays the dope-peddler Sportin' Life with great animation and a fine grotesquerie of style, while such other dependables as Georgette Harvey and J. Rosamond Johnson carry on in smaller roles. Alexander Smallens has conducted with spirit, and Eva Jessye has achieved fine choral effects. Herbert Andrews' set of Catfish Row is brilliantly picturesque, as are Paul du Pont's costumes.

Go see *Porgy and Bess* if you go to nothing else this winter.

"Jason"

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, *January 22, 1942*

'Jason' Has Premiere at Hudson Theatre

Play Concerning Drama Critics Written With Fair Humor and Some Insight

By JOHN ANDERSON

THOUGH Samson Raphaelson has no special reason for loving the New York drama critics, he has written a play about one, a synthetic and highly fictitious one, and he has done so without malice, but with fair humor and some insight.

It is called "Jason," after Medea's wandering husband and bringer of the Golden Fleece, and it was presented at the Hudson Theatre last night by George Abbott.

Some of it is excellent, and most of it is entertaining, at least to me, but since it is a matter of very localized interest you will have to discount my natural sympathy for the subject. Drama critics may be fascinating only to other drama critics, God forbid.

As a matter of fact, and of no small irony there are two characters in Mr. Raphaelson's play far more amusing than the critics. One is an exuberant self-adulant playwright drawn obviously from Mr. Saroyan, and the other is a park loafer, a cryptic failure who spent ten years at sea in a sailing vessel, including four years of the last war, and never had anything happen to him. As a bored kibitzer on life he could teach even the critic a thing or two.

The idea of a playwright using drama critics as material for a play is supposed to be pretty daring, though there are such dissimilar precedents as Sheridan, Shaw and the late Congressman Dr. Sirovich. I may even point with pride to the fact that the hero of "Arsenic and Old Lace," while admittedly illegitimate, is a drama critic and a valiant fellow. The illigitimacy is not considered an occupational handicap.

My chief disappointment in Mr. Raphaelson's portrait is that Jason Otis seems such a prig. He is clever, learned and fastidious. Clearly he has a bite much worse than his bark, but he lacks the lustrous urbanity of Mr. Nathan, the infectious enthusiasm of Dr. Woollcott, the shaggy humanity of the late Mr. Broun and warmer qualities which I, as an admittedly prejudiced friend, find among my colleagues along the aisle.

But to make Mr. Raphaelson's point Jason Otis must be aloof because he must be brought violently into contact with simple human beings, living simple lives, by Mike Ambler, the Saroyanesque playwright, who yanks Jason out of his ivory tower and makes him look at the people around him. While Jason is doing that Mike takes a look at Jason's wife, they fall in love, and the play moves to its final point of argument when Jason has to review Mike's play the very night he finds the two are planning to run away together.

Before he knew the whole truth Jason started dictating a rave notice. When he found out what was going on he wrote a devastating roast, but he destroyed both, and finally at the very end he achieved enough perspective to see both the good and the bad in Mike's play—a straddle, if you please, but untouched by his personal passions, a fair enough prize as the Golden Fleece, and presumably all wool and a yard wide. I wasn't sure whether it was criticism or a bad conscience, unless Mr. Raphaelson means to suggest that all the time Jason was looking for something that doesn't exist. Mr. Raphaelson doesn't quite expand his theme beyond Broadway parochialism.

'JASON'

A comedy in three acts by Samson Raphaelson; setting by John Root; directed by the author; presented at the Hudson Theatre on January 21, 1942, by George Abbott. The cast:

Miss Crane	Ellen Hall
Violet	Eulabelle Moore
Messenger	Nicholas Conte
Jason Otis	Alexander Knox
Lisa Otis	Helen Walker
George Bronson	Raymond Greenleaf
Bill Squibb	William Miles
Humphrey Crocker	E. G. Marshall
Nick Wiggins	Knox Stevens
Mr. Kennedy	Tom Tully
Mrs. Kennedy	Edna West

Admirably Played

But whichever way you take it it is a rather literary ending, weakly inconclusive, for a play that has a good deal of animation and considerable amusement. Though the scenes are inclined to be spotty, some of them are admirably turned and written with deft and engaging humor. The dialogue is generally bright, literate and effective, suggesting better than any play since his "Accent on Youth" the author's gift for sensitive observation and craftsmanship.

For the most part it is admirably played under the author's somewhat sluggish direction in a flatteringly spacious apartment designed by John Root. As Jason, Alexander Knox creates perfectly the character drawn by the author, clever, restlessly arid and superior to the last lift of the nostril.

Nicholas Conte, who gave such an excellent performance in the ill-fated "Walk Into My Parlor," presents such a vivid portrait of the playwright that he almost walks off with the show, and E. G. Marshall contributes an hilarious sketch of the ex-seaman who never found anything interesting.

Helen Walker plays the wife attractively enough, except vocally, though the part suffers badly from seemingly careless writing and uncertainty of characterization which contribute heavily to the failure of the final scene.

Therefore, to sum up, it seems a moderately entertaining play of strictly limited interest.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *January 22, 1942*

Critic at Bay

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

HAVING been dissected quite frequently in his time by the drama critics, Samson Raphaelson now turns about and proceeds to dissect them. On the whole it cannot be said that he is fond of the theater's pundits, finding them stuffy, priggish, prejudiced, foolish, pedantic, and not very experienced with women. Although he is tolerant enough to feel that they want to be honest and understanding, it is his conviction that they are too narrow-minded, muddled and essentially innocent to be, save by accident, proper appraisers of the works of their betters. Furthermore, he is of the firm belief that the reviewers are so bowed down under the terrible knowledge that they are not creative writers that they go around unhappily, and even bitterly, nursing their inferiority complexes. Somewhat overpowered by Mr. Raphaelson's contention that a reviewer cannot be objective, I can still say that, in his case, turn about has resulted in a fair play.

* * *

In fact, it strikes me that for all its grave faults, "Jason" is the most interesting work that Mr. Raphaelson has yet written for the theater. His plot scheme is to show you what happens to a drama critic when he comes in contact with Life, in the person of a bumptious, eccentric, outlandish and brilliantly talented playwright. More specifically, he is concerned with what might take place if the reviewer found out just before he started to review a new play that the dramatist was about to run away with his wife, who, being married to a drama critic, naturally is very beautiful. Mr. Raphaelson is firmly of the conviction that the discovery might well result in a violent change in the quality of the notice the poor fellow was about to write. In truth, he is sure that it would.

* * *

It is unquestionably a lively and provocative topic that Mr. Raphaelson has tackled. At least it has the great first-night virtue of being of interest to both critics and playwrights. The misfortune of the work, however, is that the dramatist seems better able to write about the men of his own craft than he is about the reviewers. I say this not because the critic is sometimes shown in a less than favorable light. After all, he is the hero of the play, and the wife wisely decides to stay with him. The trouble is that the critic is not only shown as a prig, but as a curiously lifeless, bloodless, incredible prig. His wife is not portrayed with any great insight, either, but she is far more believable than the husband ever is permitted to be.

* * *

On the other hand, the dramatist is admirably presented. Many authors have tried to put into their plays characters that possess some of the picturesque qualities attributed to William Saroyan, but Mr. Raphaelson is the first to do the thing successfully. Not only is the spirit, if not the factual account, of the silent man from Fresno brilliantly captured, but this same spirit is triumphant to such an extent that he rather takes over the play. For in the second act a number of Saroyan-esque personages are brought on to teach the critic about life, and they are by far the most attractive people in the drama. Here "Jason" is at its best.

* * *

Even though I cannot believe that Mr. Raphaelson's critic is drawn from life, I have great respect for the portrayal of the role that Alexander Knox offers. It is a fine performance that gives the central character of "Jason" much of the humanity of which the author had deprived him. Although inexperienced, the attractive Miss Helen Walker handles many of the scenes of the wife admirably, despite the fact that the part of the Southern millhand girl who pretends to be an aristocratic Virginian is difficult and is but intermittently well written. Nicholas Conte is first rate in the admirably done character of the eccentric dramatist, and Tom Tully is a great help as one of the Saroyanesque interlopers. In the funniest part in the play, that of a seaman who has had no adventures, E. G. Marshall is a brilliant refugee from Saroyan. The secondary critics are colorlessly portrayed, as the author intended. "Jason" is a faulty and sometimes foolish play that is yet lively and arresting.

"Jason"

NEW YORK TIMES, *January 22, 1942*

Samson Raphaelson's 'Jason' Tells the Facts of Life to a Drama Critic

By BROOKS ATKINSON

WHAT Samson Raphaelson thinks of drama critics and Saroyan gradually comes to the surface in "Jason," which was acted at the Hudson last evening. For Jason, the sybarite and elegante, is drama critic of the New York Something-or-Other, and the skyrocketing genius who haunts Jason's house is Mr. Raphaelson's notion of Saroyan.

It is another one of Mr. Raphaelson's notions that Jason lives in an ivory tower, cut off from people and insulated from the coarse world outside; and the plot of the play is to show how a free-spirited playwright teaches him the facts of life. But it would be more to the point to teach Mr. Raphaelson some of the facts of life, for his career as a successful playwright has cut him off from association with the coarse world outside his studio. Never were there such pasteboard characters and never was there such pompous dialogue outside the pages of a gaudy, slick paper romance. Mr. Raphaelson has composed his drama in a vacuum.

* * *

If drama critics live with the magnificence of Jason, this department is being cheated, and hereby puts in for a stiff raise. For Jason maintains the establishment of a merchant prince with the taste of a fashionable woman's magazine, and his wife wallows in the height and depth of luxury. Nor is Jason the man for menial pursuits. He is above lead-pencil and typewriter. He dictates his Sunday articles and reviews to a servile secretary who copies down his platinum-plated bombast in a mood of transfixed admiration. After the play he strolls home thoughtfully, pondering the rules of the drama. Dressed by the most expensive tailor in town, perfectly appointed, he walks back and forth in his book-lined and divaned living room, dictating his esthetic verdict as if he were God writing the tablets of Moses.

* * *

It may seem a little unfair to blame Mr. Raphaelson for getting the technique of drama criticism wrong and for promoting the social level of criticism to something approximating a butler's dream. But the same spuriousness extends all the way down through the play. Jason is a humorless prig, surfeited with ennui. He is married to a pretty girl who is forever talking about her high-blooded Southern family. The antic playwright who loves humanity has the dual effect of shaking Jason out of his complacence and provoking his wife into confessing that she is not a Southern swell but a "flint-head" who has tricked her way up in the world. If Mr. Raphaelson were writing satire he might get some lively amusement out of his play. But he moves his characters solemnly around like a depressed professor. What he achieves is logical, but it is not related to life.

* * *

In the design and interior decoration of the living room, John Root has done handsomely by "Jason," and the costumes are a shopkeeper's dream. Serving as his own director, Mr. Raphaelson has staged a stiff and unresourceful performance. Nicholas Conte acts the gypsy playwright with considerable bounce and spirit. Although Helen Walker is not an experienced actress yet, she is lovely and intelligent and plays the part of the wife agreeably. There is an amusing performance of a brief and amusing part by E. G. Marshall as a casual specimen of humanity, and Tom Tully rubs some good Irish vitality into the part of a visiting steamfitter.

But Alexander Knox's portrait of Jason is a monotonous and bloodless piece of acting. William Miles is a good match in dullness as a fellow-member of the Critics Circle. As a more mature agent of the night, Raymond Greenleaf looks as though he might be an amiable companion. Most of "Jason" sounds as if Mr. Raphaelson had been struggling to say something that his characters refuse to illustrate.

NEW YORK SUN, *January 22, 1942*

'Jason,' a Literary Comedy, Is Presented at the Hudson Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

PLAYWRIGHTS, like other craftsmen, enjoy few things so much as talking shop, and they prefer, if possible, to talk it to large and paying audiences. Being a witty man, Samson Raphaelson talks literary shop amusingly in "Jason," which opened last evening at the Hudson Theater. Suavely he shapes characters out of thin air, letting this one represent a drama critic and this other one a playwright full of whirling words. The result is generally entertaining, if obviously literary narcissism.

One of Mr. Raphaelson's chief characters is a play reviewer of, so far as I know, unrivaled detachment. He fastidiously holds life at arm's length, assiduously cultivates his own personality and elegantly lives by words. They seem to pay him well; he runs to a mansion and when he drifts thoughtfully home from a play a secretary waits breathlessly to take down his well-phrased judgment. It is possible that Mr. Raphaelson idealizes a little here; it is certain, I fear, that he has met few play reviewers, a somewhat more earthy crew.

This blossom from Mr. Raphaelson's well-appointed mental hot-house is besieged by a playwright and, without meaning William Saroyan more harm than usual, I may suggest that Mr. Raphaelson's playwright is an obvious burlesque of Mr. Saroyan. The playwright sets out to teach the critic about life and urges that he love the beautiful people. Between them, after the first shock has worn off, they collect samples of beautiful people, several of them very amusing. But the playwright, being amoral in such matters, also comes close to collecting the critic's wife, a veritable cutie with, however, a doubtful past. The critic is thereupon tempted, being understandingly annoyed, to give the playwright's new drama a bad review. But, being honest as all critics are, he restrains this evil impulse and dictates what Variety would, I suspect, call a "no opinion" notice.

Liking much of "Jason" considerably, I still would not overpraise it. All of its characters, to put it bluntly and to except one or two of the casuals, are made of words and not of flesh and blood. (Mr. Raphaelson's detachment from life must exceed that of the erudite critic of his play.) The wife is not even well contrived of words and when the triangle is sounded the play turns dull. A good deal of last act trouble is to be noted and the drama ends in vague anticlimax. No doubt its interest is for a special group, and the group must be small which is concerned with the tribulations of reviewers. But its wit is suave and it has the gloss of literary professionalism, and these are not small things.

Both suavity and professionalism extend to the cast. Alexander Knox, practically without moving his facial muscles once, is dryly amusing as the critic, one Jason Otis, by the by. Nicholas Conte, moving his facial muscles like anything, is properly extravagant as the playwright. E. G. Marshall is hilarious in a few moments. Helen Walker is up against something pretty tough in the role of the wife, but gives every indication of understanding the character, thus being at least one up on this department. And—oh, yes!—any resemblance between the characters in "Jason" and actual persons is highly improbable.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
January 22, 1942

Are Drama Critics Really That Dull?

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THE aisle seats at the Hudson were fitted up with spikes last night, for in *Jason* Mr. Raphaelson has written at flattering length, if in no very flattering manner, about a drama critic. No one of us, so far as I could judge, was individually flattened out, but as a group we shall go about in sober livery today. For, while not imputing anything depraved or criminal to the profession, Mr. Raphaelson has made it clear that drama critics are even less glamorous and dashing than vegetarians or hermits. Unfortunately, however, in dragging us down he has dragged himself down as well.

For if we must face the fact that we are dull, Mr. Raphaelson must face the fact that we are dull to write about. The point he wants to make about his chilly, overfastidious Jason Otis is that inwardly he is dead. He makes the point all right, but not to the advantage of living drama. And though he slowly brings Jason back to life by hurling him up against a pulsating young playwright who could hardly be anybody but the famed Saroyan, the play refuses to follow suit. Holding the mirror up to Nathan fails to reveal even the faintest mist upon the glass.

The whole thing, which includes a sex triangle by way of plot, seems painfully artificial and literary. Mr. Raphaelson has real wit which makes for amusing moments, he has a fitful sense of style and is capable of insight; but in *Jason* he throws all his talents out the window. He not only can't touch reality, but he can't achieve a tone. At times he satirizes his characters, at times he burlesques them, at times he takes them fairly seriously. But at no time does he animate them. Jason changes, but he does not develop. The fact that he dictates his reviews to a secretary, in perfect English, at a staggering pace, without the slightest pause, is by no means the most incredible thing about him. (I, by the way, have rewritten this last sentence three times.)

As Jason, Alexander Knox gave a tight-lipped, stiff-necked performance that was probably faithful to his unengaging role. Nicholas Conte was very good, and never overflamboyant, as the Saroyanesque playwright; and in a small character part E. G. Marshall gave to the play its brightest half-dozen moments.

"Jason"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *January 22, 1942*

Play About a Dramatic Critic and a Wife-Stealing Saroyan

By JOHN MASON BROWN

AS ANY reviewer or his wife could have told Samson Raphaelson before he bothered to write Jason, the only trouble with a dramatic critic as the major character in a play is that dramatic critics are not dramatic.

I think I know whereof I speak when I say this. I am on friendly terms with all those ungentlemen of the press in the hallowed Critics Circle who are cherished by Lawrence Langner and others as "The Boys." And not one of them, including yours truly, can pretend to lead the active life of Orestes, Jeeter Lester or even Hamlet.

We may travel to Stepney Depot, Forest Hills, Durham, the Royalton, Java or even to the Hudson on 44th St. as we did last night, but by choice and profession we are happy to remain spectators. We do not act; we are acted upon. We are seismographs, not earthquakes; sitters rather than doers; tasters, not brewers. We may toss adjectives around bravely at midnight—adjectives that are over-violent in praise or abuse. But our adventures end with our reflexes, our opinions, our ideas, our ideals and the Thesaurus. Even what we write with labor is passive enough to have been described by Percy Hammond as the venom of contented rattlesnakes. Although unpopular villains we may be to some, popular heroes we are to none except to ourselves and a few of the discerning we have praised.

Yet prigs of the Jason Otis variety, I think I can assert without embarrassing immodesty, we are not. I hope Mr. Raphaelson will not mind my pointing this out before getting around to his play, which, though it is not much of a play, is not uninteresting—at least to that special coterie to whom dramatic critics are interesting and William Saroyan's personality is a flaming topic.

I trust Mr. Raphaelson won't mind, either, if I point out that I have not dictated a review at midnight in the luxurious fashion of his Jason for exactly 41 years. Neither, I suspect, have any of my confreres. Nor do dramatic critics drink sherry when they foregather. Or live as snugly as the overfastidious Jason does in a country house in the city without a typewriter in sight. Or talk as fluently as Mr. Raphaelson makes Jason talk. Or enjoy the elastic deadlines and the happy moments for visiting before going to their labors that Jason takes for granted. Moreover, I must insist that none of us—our ethics being what they are—would think, even for a second, of writing a bad notice just because we had caught the author of the play we were reviewing kissing our wives. Knowing "The Boys" as I do, I feel confident that every Galahad amongst them would bend backward in such a sorry case to praise the play and get someone else to kill the author.

But mention of these slight inaccuracies will, I am sure, strike Mr. Raphaelson (and others no less unfamiliar than he is with the code and habits of the dramatic professional lovers) as irrelevancies. So they are in the case of Jason, except for the fact that Jason plays a large and incredible part in Mr. Raphaelson's comedy, even though this impossible prig is excellently and thoughtfully projected in the acting of Alexander Knox.

* * *

What is interesting in Mr. Raphaelson's play is that he is at heart concerned with the problem of how a sterile mind (i. e., a dramatic critic's) is fertilized by a creative genius (i. e., William Saroyan). The irony of Mr. Raphaelson's unsparing portrait of Mr. Saroyan is that Mr. Saroyan steals Mr. Raphaelson's show, especially as he is played by Nicholas Conté, that fine young actor who was so promising, if undisciplined, in Walk Into My Parlor and who is now giving so admirable, persuasive and brilliant a performance.

Mr. Saroyan, the child of nature, the St. Francis from Fresno and the little violet who, according to Mr. Raphaelson, addresses God in such words as "Lord! You did a wonderful thing when you created me!" has something of Mr. Saroyan's own magic about him. So has such an hilarious Saroyan character as Humphrey Crocker, the stranger picked up by the awakened dramatic critic who has been wonderfully unresponsive to the excitements of a full life on the Seven Seas and who is commendably acted by E. G. Marshall.

* * *

But the rest of Mr. Raphaelson's characters are paper dolls trying to be people—and failing. Once again in this saga of a critic who almost loses his wife to a moonstruck dramatist, Mr. Raphaelson writes lines that are occasionally very funny. Once again he shows at times the same quality of mind which distinguished his Accent on Youth, even if his plot and his waif's party are feeble. Once again, too, Mr. Raphaelson betrays a flair for individual scenes which are felicitous. Moreover, his direction of Geoge Abbott's smooth production is at all times worthy of John Root's bookish setting, which is enviable even if it includes the wrong drama books.

The evening, however, is one that seems apt to appeal mainly to drama critics and their friends. Jason would have had a better chance of succeeding if only it had been a better play that could appeal not merely to the enemies of dramatic critics but to those who neither know nor care about their existence; in other words, to the general public.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *January 22, 1942*

'Jason' Is the Story of a Drama Critic Who Discovers a Genius

"Jason," drama by Samson Raphaelson. Produced by George Abbott at the Hudson Theatre, New York, Jan. 21, 1942.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

I HAVE a feeling that Samson Raphaelson took the crowd at the Hudson Theatre last night a little by surprise. They had heard he had written, in a drama called "Jason," a story about a drama critic, and they were prepared to laugh from the waist.

Some of them did laugh, a little lamely, when Mr. Raphaelson's critic was trying to dictate a notice covering a drama he had just seen, written by an unbridled genius who had quite naively decided to seduce Mrs. Jason.

But for the most part they were sobered by the author's discovery of a credible sort of critic—a Jason searching for the golden fleece that is any workman's individual integrity.

Popularly drama critics, as a group, are presumed to be concerned with the discovery of nothing more important than this day's most quotable gags, and troubled by nothing less than stomach ulcers.

Quite as important, and far more interesting, is Mr. Raphaelson's attempt to uncover, if not to fathom, the character of a man of genius among his own playwriting group; an undisciplined genius—and the comparison is frankly forced upon you—of William Saroyan, for example.

Friendly Approach

Here again the search is, it seems to me, both honest and kindly. This playwriting genius is a poet who communes with God and Nature; a child of destiny floundering through his first years in a kindergarten of philosophy; a fantastic fellow who savagely loves humanity.

He is a Messenger Boy who hears voices and probably smokes too many cigarets. Having put his message into a play he seeks out Jason Otis, an erudite leader among critics, to explain its meaning.

He finds a somewhat jaded Jason; an unhappy introvert worried about his failing interest in all the phases of life the theatre reflects. He inspires Jason's doubt of Jason, and sets him experimenting with new contacts with people.

Incidentally he makes love to Mrs. Jason, herself a Saroyanesque bit of unhappiness from the South, searching for an answer to her own restlessness. But this doesn't mean anything—not to the genius.

At the End

It comes to an end, of at least to a halt, at 11 o'clock—the Messenger's play, the wife's worry, the critic's analysis of and reaction to his newest brush with life. But it will be going on again tonight, and for a world of nights in the theatre or out of it. Because "Jason" offers a sidelight and not a solution.

There are splendid performances by the actors—Alexander Knox's thoughtful and troubled writing man; Nicholas Conte's impassioned and puzzled genius. These lead the rest.

Helen Walker's wife is a trifle strained and shrill, but earnest and mostly believable. And there are short parts played by Tom Tully and Edna West, Ellen Hall and Eulabelle Moore and E. G. Marshall.

A comfortable, good-looking living room by John Root. Honest, reasonably clarifying direction by Mr. Raphaelson. Last night's audience was attentive and inclined to be demonstrative at the end.

"Jason"

NEW YORK POST, *January 22, 1942*

"Jason," or What Happens When A Drama Critic Meets Saroyan

By WILELLA WALDORF

SAMSON RAPHAELSON has been giving the Saroyan problem his deepest attention. Mr. Raphaelson is by no means unique in so doing, but he has gone further and considered with rare sympathy and compassion the plight of Broadway's dramatic critics on finding themselves suddenly and without warning, face to face with genius.

Dramatic critics, as anyone who follows the Broadway theatre month after month is well aware, are not often embarrassed by the necessity of appraising genius, and it is only natural that they should be somewhat confused, at first, as to how to deal with it. Especially when it erupts into the living room in the person of a wild-eyed young man in a rumpled grey suit waving a manuscript and shouting: "Lord, you did a great job when you made me!"

In his new play, "Jason," presented by George Abbott last night at the Hudson Theatre, Mr. Raphaelson has written a farce or fantasy or drama—call it what you will—as crazily moving, diverting, cock-eyed and exasperating as some of Saroyan's own masterpieces, and including, besides, a brilliant, if somewhat idealized, portrait of Saroyan himself among its characters.

A Genius Is Born

Mr. Saroyan will be the first to protest that no other playwright could even begin to approximate his own vivid and peculiar style of poetic ecstasy, but Mr. Raphaelson has not only probed around among the inner-workings of our prevailing dramatic genius, but also peered through the cultured facade of Jason Otis, who refers to himself calmly as the greatest living judge of the drama.

The spectacle of the super-critic opening his heart and home to the eccentric dramatist whose love for humanity is so overwhelming that it even includes the critic's wife is a little hard to swallow at first, but no harder, after all, than most of the goings-on in Saroyan's own plays. And once Jason Otis is off on his quest to "get the feel of people," inviting steam-fitters and longshoremen and plumbers' assistants in for sandwiches and beer, the fun becomes pretty furious, especially during the brief visit of Humphrey Crocker, a second-class seaman, who started out as a stagehand at the Metropolitan Opera House. Mr. Crocker found Bombay, Calcutta and Rio "noisy," and Caruso just an ordinary Italian.

After a somewhat devitalizing party attended by what one of Jason's colleagues refers to as "the strays," and the sudden discovery that Mrs. Otis is just as smitten with the dramatist as Mr. Otis is, the critic is faced with the problem of reviewing the genius's first play. Since he is that rare bird, a critic who dictates his copy to a secretary instead of pounding it out on a typewriter like the lower orders, the audience is permitted to struggle with him while he changes his mind, his wife changes hers, and the night foreman in his paper's composing room, we should imagine, is rending the air with curses.

Mr. Conte and Mr. Knox

Mr. Raphaelson's knack for writing graceful, witty and stimulating dialogue is often in evidence in "Jason," and he has directed the play himself with considerable ingenuity, aided enormously by the smooth performances of Nicholas Conte as the dramatic genius and Alexander Knox as the critical titan.

Between them Mr. Raphaelson and Mr. Conte make Mike Ambler a far more human and beguiling figure than Saroyan's extensive publicity has pictured him, while Mr. Knox is so imperturbably charming, so elegantly erudite most of the time that one accepts with easy-going tolerance the fact that Jason Otis is also, on occasion, a stuffed-shirt and an ass.

In the writing of his leading feminine character, the wife, Mr. Raphaelson seems to have fallen down rather badly. She is the false note in his dramatic medley. Designed as a self-made young woman of lower class Carolina stock, passing herself off as the fair floweret of an old Virginia family—"My father was Colonel Breckenridge, sah!"—she comes forth in her true colors when Mike Ambler, that lover of humanity, exerts his hypnotic influence.

We found Lisa Otis almost completely unbelievable, even as a figure of farce or fantasy, certainly as a dramatic character. Mr. Raphaelson himself never seems to see her very clearly, using her merely as a device to promote his plot. Nor does Helen Walker, a relatively inexperienced actress, do much to clarify the obscurity. Since Lisa is supposed to have put over a major acting job in passing herself off on Mr. Otis as a Virginia belle, there is little to be said for his critical faculties that he did not see through her at once. Unconvincing is the word for Lisa. She'd never fool a correspondence school detective.

Raymond Greenleaf and William Miles are diverting as Jason's critical colleagues who are not inclined to go in for harboring waifs and strays, while Tom Tully, as the steam-fitter, has a chance to put on one of his famous drunk scenes. Particularly enjoyable is, E. G. Marshall as the second-class seaman who's been everywhere and seen everything but is not impressed by anything.

"All in Favor"

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
January 21, 1942

'All in Favor' Opens At Miller's Theatre

Scatterbrained Comedy of Adolescence Has Washington Heights Setting

By JOHN ANDERSON

FURTHER developments in the kindergarten drama took place at Henry Miller's Theatre last night when a group of youngsters got dialogue on their bibs in what amounts to a three-act marbleswap called "All in Favor" by Louis Hoffman and Don Hartman. It is scatter-brained comedy of adolescence, full of toy emotions and kiddie-kar humor, in fact, a sort of male version of "Junior Miss," which suggests that a mister is not as good for a smile. On my vote the "noes" have it.

All of it takes place in the Club Revel, a dingy room in Washington Heights where the neighborhood lads congregate to look at sexy pictures in the magazines, play the radio and ping pong, and stand off the landlord for the $10 a month rent. It is the rent that gives the play all it has for a plot, a small speck which would probably cause less irritation if it were merely in your eye instead of on the stage.

For to clear up their desperate finances the boys decide to take in girl members, and agree even to let Pee Wee McDougall in as a regular member, though he is only twelve and undesirable, I should think, at any age. Pee Wee finds that his older brother, all innocence and gallantry, has stayed all night in the club to protect a Brooklyn girl who didn't have carfare home, and then he blackmails them for the price of his membership.

You would only turn quickly and with my best wishes to Louis Sobol, Dorothy Kilgallen, Cholly Knickerbocker, Bill Corum, the Daily Horoscope and Popeye if I tried to explain that Wack Wack (Pee Wee's brother) told the club members that he had bet the $10 on a horse that seemed bound to lose and you would give up completely, as I did, if I added that the unlikely horse won, and that Wack Wack then had to explain why he didn't have $100 instead of the original $10.

There is some business of pawning a diamond ring that didn't belong to Wack Wack, and a little scene in which Wack Wack swallows a ten cent ring to prove by X-rays that he swallowed the good one.

These peculiar and phony-seeming incidents are strung together on dialogue so strident that it sounds as if it had been dictated through a tin horn during a New Year's celebration, and animated by characters whose resemblance to the human race in most of the cases must be purely accidental.

Only three of the youngsters appeared to have either substance or humanity—Wack Wack, the girl, and the dreadful Pee Wee, who, as a bland, unscrupulous tyrant of twelve, had a certain humorous interest—especially in Master Tommy Lewis' buxom impersonation.

As played tenderly by Frances Heflin, Cynthia had some quiet charm, and Raymond Roe played the heroic but misguided Wack Wack with a skill and sensitiveness worthy of a much better part.

Arnold Stang and Bob Readick perform admirably with the material at their disposal, and as the beleaguered elders of the cast Frank Conlan, J. C. Nugent and James R. Waters not only contribute excellent performances but excite profound sympathy over their plight.

Since the writing offers almost no variety Elliott Nugent as director presumably could do nothing to relieve the rather strained, headlong tempo of a play that seemed emptier and emptier as it went along picking itself up, and casting me down.

"All in Favor"

NEW YORK SUN
January 21, 1942

'All in Favor,' a Youthful Farce, Opens at Henry Miller's Theatre

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THE troubles of some boys and girls who need $30 to pay rent on their clubroom are considered in a spirit of excited merriment by the authors of "All in Favor," which squirmed into Henry Miller's Theater last evening and almost tore it down. This may seem slight matter for a play in three acts, and slight matter for a play in three acts is precisely what it is. Louis Hoffman and Don Hartman, in avoiding the ponderous, have happened upon a theme which is almost too small to pick up.

They have certainly made the most of it. They start out with boys only, but this oversight is quickly rectified. Under circumstances more complicated than I need mention, the most sensitive boy and the prettiest girl spend the night innocently together in the club room. The boy's small brother, an incipient monster, finds them out and from his discovery strange complications flow and are pulled. The financial situation grows more acute, non-existent money is wagered on a winning horse, a ring has to be swallowed to take the place of a ring which has been pawned under a misapprehension, young men beat on tables and on each other and squealing young ladies conceal a youth from the police by sitting on him. Mr. Hoffman and Mr. Hartman are almost frighteningly inventive.

They are funny too, now and again, and some of their scenes of young love are almost touching. (It's mighty hard to miss on that last, incidentally.) It would be foolish to deny that animal spirits are rampant in "All In Favor" or that the youthful actors perform with a vigor which would speedily exhaust their elders in Equity—and frequently, as a matter of fact, exhausted me, passive in the audience. If playwrights are going to compose farces about boys and girls who want to raise money to pay rent on club rooms, "All In Favor" is every inch the play to be hoped for.

But there is not, I suspect, any compulsion to write, on this plane anyway, of such tiny matters. Adults are funny enough, surely, without robbing the comic cradles. Writing about the young is a special art and this art does not, on the whole, consist in viewing the comic perplexities of the adolescent precisely as if they were the comic perplexities of the adult. This just makes the children look sort of silly, and leaves you holding, as Mr. Hoffman and Mr. Hartman are, a sort of silly play.

Several of the youngsters show skill as well as energy. Raymond Roe and Frances Heflin are particularly pleasing; little Tommy Lewis is as comical a monster as you would want to see, and shrink from, and several others have comic voices and methods. I must admit, however, that J. C. Nugent never looked so good to me before as he did when he, as one of the few grownups in the cast, chugged onto the stage. It was just pleasant to see somebody over 20 for a change.

Lots of people in the audience, on the other hand, seemed to be having fun right along.

'ALL IN FAVOR'

A comedy in three acts by Louis Hoffman and Don Hartman staged by Elliott Nugent; settings by Samuel Leve; presented at Henry Miller's Theatre on January 20, 1942, by Mr. Nugent, Robert Montgomery and Jesse Duncan. The cast:

Tony.....Ralph Brooke
Wack Wack (Harry McDougal),
Raymond Roe
Weasel.....Arnold Stang
Flip.....Bob Readick
Marco (Lover).....Leslie Barrett
Mr. Piper.....Frank Conlan
Peewee (Edgar McDougal),
Tommy Lewis
Helen.....Gloria Mann
Jean.....Claire Frances
Cynthia.....Frances Heflin
Bixby.....J. C. Nugent
Gorman.....James R. Waters
Officer Callahan.....Harry Antrim
Radio Voices:
The Professor.....Milton Herman
Sasha.....Hank Wolf
Myron.....Freddie Geffen
Raymond.....George Speylin, Jr.
Young Lady.....Joy Geffen

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
January 21, 1942

"All in Favor" Is a Tale of Adolescents Just Out of Bedlam

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

OF COURSE this return to adolescence in the theatre can be overdone. In fact it was overdone at Henry Miller's theatre last night in a comedy written by Louis Hoffman and Don Hartman and produced by Elliott Nugent.

The comedy is called "All in Favor," and I'll wager any given sum that even Mr. Nugent doesn't believe it. Back is its history somewhere there is an explanation. Perhaps the Nugent partners in production, Robert Montgomery and Jesse Duncan, had their reasons for wanting to see it staged. Maybe they thought that a Broadway production would help sell it to the Mickey Rooney or Judy Garland interests.

Anyway, here it is, and, to me, sadly disappointing. Elliott Nugent is one of my hopes of the future for the theatre, and I can't help feeling that they have done him wrong.

A jumbled and confused story of a Washington Heights gang of teen-old girls and boys, it would tell you that after they had run up a rent bill of $30 for a basement clubroom they saved themselves from eviction by winning the jackpot on a radio quiz program.

Not bad as a plot, but the approach is crude and the treatment hard on both reason and nerves. Here and there a brief interlude is pleasantly played by Raymond Roe and Frances Heflin, showing the finer Nugent touch in direction, but for the most part it is a bewildering assortment of scenes carelessly written and generously overplayed.

Little Miss Heflin strengthens the impression she has previously made as a debutante ingenue who is headed for a fine stage career. She has beauty, presence, earnestness and a nice feeling for character.

Raymond Roe, who grew out of his red wig and his short pants in "Life With Father," is also blessed with sterling qualities as a juvenile. A flashing little brunette, Gloria Mann, has been badly advised as to the overaccentuation of her good points, but is spirited and talented.

Tommy Lewis, the chubby stalwart who did so grand a job with "On Borrowed Time," is still chubby and still the best actor of his years (which are 12) in this neighborhood.

The veteran Frank Conlan has an adult bit, and J. C. Nugent another.

The setting of the basement clubroom is by Samuel Leve, and nicely conceived. Mr. Elliott's direction is generally confused, which is a fault not common to him.

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Fun in the Club

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

YOUTH is frolicking skittishly again in the new play called "All in Favor." This time the boys and girls are in a rather mixed mood, combining some of the characteristics of "Dead End" with a few of the qualities of "What a Life" in a comedy which has neither the realism of the former nor the gay charm of the latter. In fact, what they give us is youth that lacks both credibility and engaging humor, with the result that the antic set down by a couple of playwrights named Louis Hoffman and Don Hartman is among the minor entertainments of the season. Although Elliott Nugent has staged it sympathetically, "All in Favor" is but intermittent fun.

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It is my guess that one mistake made by Mr. Nugent and his colleges, Robert Montgomery and Jesse Duncan, in producing their play lay in feeling that the children of the story were likable. The tale they are telling about the efforts of some boys and girls to keep their club going despite financial handicaps would be of interest only if every member of the audience felt with some passion that here were such delightful young people that it would be a minor tragedy to deprive them of their fun. Since, however, most of these juveniles belong among the (disagreeable characters of the season, I have a feeling that the majority of the spectators will share my conviction that they deserved to be tossed out of their clubroom.

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In fairness to every one concerned, it should be added that any comparison with "Dead End" is possibly more or less of a coincidence. At least, the authors obviously did not intend to paint a dire picture of the horrible results of slum life on the characters of the young. On the contrary, they clearly intended to point out how essentially delightful and engaging the youth of a city can be, despite surface toughness. Nevertheless, what happens is that the membership of the Club Revel in Washington Heights is, with a few exceptions, made up of incipient Pal Joeys, or less. One of my few interests of the evening resided in attempting to find out which of the children I liked the least.

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In the role of the young lady who serves as the heroine of the occasion Miss Frances Heflin, who was so good just a few weeks ago in "The Walrus and the Carpenter," demonstrates once more that she is among the youthful actresses worth watching. The most bearable of the boys is likewise pleasantly played by Raymond Roe, who was recently encountered in this vicinity in a disaster called "Little Dark Horse." The other members of the Club Revel were also portrayed by actors in their teens, some of whom have learned quite a lot about Westphalia for youngsters of such tender years. I take no stock in the rumor that Mr. Nugent was getting some sort of vengeance on his father, J. C. Nugent, by setting him down in the cast amid this infant opposition. Let us hope that the new producing firm of Nugent, Montgomery & Duncan will have better luck next time.